

Spring 2016 ~ Gravity Hill



Ryan Perez, Editor

Editor's Page

Over my four years as a student at St. Andrews, something special that has stuck out about the school is the vast array of opportunities that are offered. I'd like to start by thanking Dr. Ted Wojtasik for not only granting me the opportunity to work as the student editor of *Gravity Hill*, but also for helping cultivate my own, as well as countless other students' love for reading, writing, publishing, and all things creative.

I would also like to extend thanks to all the faculty and staff at St. Andrews that help make *Gravity Hill* possible. In particular, I'd like to give special thanks to Dr. Edna Ann Loftus, as well as Professors Betsy Dendy and Madge McKeithen for the same support, direction, and wisdom that they extend to all their students. Their precious efforts and service do not go unnoticed.

I'm honored to be involved in such an artistically thriving and supportive environment as St. Andrews, and it would be nothing without the students. That being said, I'd like to thank all the students and

alumni for their submissions as well as recognize the winners of the *Gravity Hill* writing awards this year:

Marie Gilbert Award

Baron Bray-Sackey, "Whatever I choose"

Nancy Bradberry Award

Shaqueena Kemp, "The thought of you with someone else..."

Editor's Choice Award

Sophie Iannuzzi, "Dead End"

I'd like to give a last personal thanks for all those who have helped opened the myriad doors of opportunity for me, and I strongly encourage all St. Androids to actively pursue all opportunities they may find themselves in life's great journey. Above all, never stop reading and writing!

Namaste,
Ryan Perez, STUDENT EDITOR

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The Long March

Baron Bray-Sackey

The long march

long winding road
carries the

forgotten footsteps of
a people

who fought for
their beliefs

Whatever I Choose

Baron Bray-Sackey

I am the summer rain on a cloudy day. I feel the cool breeze guiding me. Mother Nature catches me in her warm muddy grasp, hugging me close. I am a tall tree on a winter day. Naked and bare the cold snow embraces me. I see the sheets of snow covering the world in white before me. I am a sunflower in spring. I hear the buzzing bees hunting for a taste of my sweet nectar. I am the earth in autumn. The wet taste of fallen leaves reminds me of cornflakes left in milk too long. I am a dog, chasing after the fragrant scent of a bitch's behind. I am whatever I choose to be, whatever I choose to experience because I am human and I have a mind.

Last Night was Cerebral

Anonymous

Last night was cerebral. Waking up from the slumber, stumbling into the cafeteria, I ate. "There's more." We sat, we rode, and we walked. I was now nowhere and everywhere. Now to observe.

Places Past Seen

Steven Dennis

Florida, Georgia, and Alabama
Beaches, peaches, and cotton

South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee
Peaches, planes, and caves

Illinois, Virginia, and D.C.
Sears, seven cities, and national pride

Colorado, Utah, and Vermont
Snowboarding, skiing, and more skiing

California, Washington, and Texas
Hollywood, trees, and ponies

This is America still the world left to explore
So much to see, is it possible in a lifetime?

India may be third world
Yet they are connected

Japan may have overcrowded cities
Yet they have tradition

Canada may be cold
Yet they have warm maple syrup

Mexico may have danger
Yet they know how to party

Aruba may be isolated
Yet they are happy

This is the world with so much more to see
Is it possible in one lifetime? We can only try.

Reflection

Jack Donahue

In a lit room next to a window I look up at my
transparent reflection against the darkness of night. I
look through myself into the eyes hiding in darkness
staring easily at me.

Pizza Delivery

Jack Donahue

Pulling out of the parking lot, I approach the light that's rarely green to turn onto Main Street—it's a no-turn-on-red light too. It's my last delivery of the night and I want to get it over with so I inch out into the shoulder and notice no oncoming traffic, even though I can only inch out so far. My impatience gets the best of me and I make the turn to instantly see blinding headlights in my rear view mirror.

I hear a bottle smash at the back of my car and see the lights grow overwhelmingly bright in my mirror as the car gets inches from mine. Nerves sink in as I think, Did I cut this guy off? Bayberry Street, the street where I need to bring this goddamned pizza comes into view. As I merge into the turning lane, it becomes clear I'm being followed. I curse to myself and at the motherfucker behind me in a flash of anxiety. I make the turn and the blinding headlights remain persistent. "Jesus Christ," I say aloud. "Maybe when he realizes I'm a pizza delivery boy he'll let up."

I begin driving slow to look for the house number. The darkness and this guy on my back turn it into a daunting challenge. My eyes search for the doors and mailboxes of the never-ending houses but it seems that I've passed it. No fucking way. I continue searching knowing that I've passed it. I look at the address again on the receipt, but there's no mistake: *66 Bayview Ave. Bayshore, NY*. "This is not possible," I spit out of my mouth in frustration. I continue

forward slowly, totally unaware of what I should do. I stare blankly in uncertainty for a moment then say, "Fuck it," and make a U-turn. Now that I'm angry, I stop my car next to my admirer and roll down my window. As I begin to speak, I look up to see the shiny barrel of a gun pointed at me by a big, grizzly, ugly man who spews out a drunken ramble of negative comments that sound like, "Yo mofuckah I blow you hed owf." Without hesitation, I slam on the gas and drive back from where I came from while watching him make a U-turn to follow me. I reach Main Street and quickly turn. Finally I reach the street of the pizzeria and frantically turn. I pull into the parking lot and watch anxiously in my rear view mirror the psychopath in the truck zoom by.

I'm left relieved and uncertain of how to proceed. I look down at the receipt and the printed address to comprehend this confusion: *66 Bayberry Ave. Bayshore, NY...* I slowly look up realizing that I was on the wrong avenue. I get out of my car, walk in to the pizzeria, and say, "I quit."

Dinner Party

Katie Enders

“Oh yes, darling, you simply *must* get one!” Ms. Iannuzzi doted, her Louboutin heels clicking on the marble as she walked. The sound echoed through the mansion’s halls as she led her dinner party guests towards a back room where she would finally reveal her new pets. The guests always found themselves wondering how she found these exotic pets. What would it be next? A lion? A tank full of sharks? Ms. Iannuzzi had always loved things that veered into the category of dangerous.

Her fur coat trailed along the marble behind her as she walked, pursing her lips, knowing that all of the guests would turn green with envy when they saw.

As they reached the room, the guests listened intently for an indicator of what they were about to see. The heavy wood door swung open to reveal cages full of zombies, some of them looking to be people that some of the guests knew.

“Now,” she began, closing the door behind them, “it’s time to feed them.” A smirk came across her lips as she clicked the lock on the door.

The guests of the dinner party were angry. They thought Ms. Iannuzzi was crazy to lock them in the room with cages of emaciated zombies growling just a mere few feet away. The guests walked over to the cages seeing familiar faces turned distant as they bit at the titanium bars that enclosed them. One guest

noticed a zombie in a pastel pink shirt and \$500 loafers. Ms. Iannuzzi had left her own brother in one of the cages to rot. They tried to think of ways to avoid their imminent death. Climbing up on the cages wouldn't work; it was too risky. They couldn't possibly break down the door; it was much too heavy. Maybe they could fight them off. Women took off their heels and divided them up to each person to use as a weapon. This could work. Maybe.

Ms. Iannuzzi listened at the door to have a good laugh at the plans they tried to form and the hierarchies they attempted to develop. These people had tried for years to get close to her in the hopes they would gain something. Her generosity had made her weak to them. They came to parties only to get lavish party favors. They went to dinner with her and conveniently forgot their wallets each time. Everyone was always asking for something. They *used* her. *Not anymore*, she thought, as she pressed a big, glittery gold button on the wall to open the zombies' cages.

Ghost

Katie Enders

She was a thing of beauty. Her big blue eyes reminded him of the moon. He watched as she wrapped her thin fingers around the neck of the martini glass, finishing the entire drink in one long, painful-looking gulp. She coughed as she set the glass back on the sticky surface of the bar. He *had* to approach her.

“Hello, miss, I’m David. Can I get you a drink?” She simply turned to look at him with her tear-filled eyes, pressing her lips together as she struggled to understand how the man in front of her didn’t realize that she wanted to be left alone. They locked eyes, both waiting for a response that wouldn’t come for moments until he was brought out of his reverie.

“Who are you talking to?” The bartender asked, wiping down the counter. David looked away from the woman in front of him to face the bartender, motioning towards her to answer the question. As he rolled his eyes he returned his attention back to where she had been just moments ago, seeing only an empty seat.

This was not the first time this had happened. David had a bad habit of seeing people who weren’t there. Well, they were sort of there. He had come to adopt the idea that he saw ghosts. He often saw people who simply looked like they didn’t belong: women in flapper dresses, men in bell bottoms, and the like. As a child it had scared him, but he had grown to accept it ... although it did provide an occasional annoyance

or confusion. Too many times had he made a fool of himself making small talk or asking directions from one of his ghosts. He had butchered a job interview once when he asked a ghastly secretary for a glass of water, and embarrassed himself at his graduation when he tried to hug his grandmother's ghost, and now here he was, trying to hit on one.

"You've had about six too many," the bartender grumbled.

No more, he thought, no more making myself look like a jackass. It's time to fix this.

The next day, David got in his car and drove 130 miles to a mental hospital that he found in the old phonebook he had taken from his grandmother's house when she died. The drive there had been lackluster, with nothing to look at except desert plains, the occasional piece of roadkill resting on the yellow lines to his right, and the much more frequent ghastly hitchhikers. Every so often he would consider turning around, but each hallucination made it more clear that he needed to do this. He needed help.

He arrived and spent a few minutes in the car, pondering if this was the right decision. Finally, he forced himself to go inside and he was admitted to the beautiful institution. It did seem kind of dated, but he was willing to overlook it. David was excited to be getting the care he needed. He began to make friends with the other patients and even some of the faculty, and he met his doctors. He was so proud of himself.

He did overlook one small detail, though, and that was the “No Trespassing” signs plastered all across the outside of the building. The institution had been closed for over 30 years.

take a walk

Jeb “Sunshine” Forehand

take a walk
warm sun
on your face
fresh air
in your lungs
rushing through your nostrils
on your tongue
on your mind
tingling
in your soul

look up
through the canopy
at the sky
off into endless space
the endless possibilities
always above you
engulfing you
and your tiny planet

wonder
if someone else
off in that vastness
is doing the same

slats of light
shimmer down
rays dodge leaf and limb
reverently adorning
the forest floor
a stained glass window
crunching under your feet

the faded colors
of late autumn

yellow orange red air
endless down
trails still untraveled
fallen trees
also return to dust
a tiny cloud swirls
with every step
somewhere
in the depths
some small animal
pounces periodically
through the fallen leaves
squirrels hurl themselves
from one tree to another
a chorus
of birds and insects
exalting

the forest
the world
is a temple
to the light
it is our Father
whiteness
all-encompassing
whiteness
from which
all forms descend
we compete
for its affection

it travels
millions of miles
in minutes
bearing energy for life
trees reach out
their foliage
receiving its gift
the light imbues
the leaf

empowering the tree
to build itself
from the ground
into the air
out of the air

out of atoms
forged in the heart
of an ancient
star
out of simplicity
hydrogen and helium
comes limitless variety
colors
shapes
a collage
a community
multitudes
in search of the light

an acorn
falls randomly
into the womb of the earth
with a plan
a pattern of processes
a blueprint
it sprouts hopefully
those first tiny leaves
find its first light
and it grows

prometheus
brought the light to earth
prokaryote
dividing and differentiating
endlessly
until here you stand
in the shade of the tall trees
the same ancestry

Knock, Knock

Natalia Garcia

Knock, knock. There's something behind the door.

"Hello? Who is it?"

"Hello, would you open the door?" says the voice.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I know there's nobody there."

Bamboo Forest

Nolan Gilmour

September, I step
Each day under blue skies,
Towards nothing new

October, I push through
The misty breeze
Ever so slowly
I make my way.

Down dirt paths
Trees over head
Fresh air.

November, December, January,
I might have thirty minutes for you
Maybe I like the cold
Now and again.

I would bring a friend
Half the time they just pretend
To appreciate you in the end
But no more will I lend
My time

On people with no mind
For anything but the indoors
They're afraid it will pour
Rain.

February, I drag
Feet all the way to your front door.
Someone has to show respect

It's not who left their beers
I don't care if it were a cheers.
To think I call you my peers.

Hours spent.
Cleaning as if I paid the rent.
So when March comes
I can pitch a tent

March, April, I'm not surprised
You're trashed again
Swarming with flies
All because the weather

It's warming.
This should be seen as a warning.
That not many care
About the natural world.

Just the digital one.

May, at last
I keep looking to the past.
It's gone by too fast.
There will be no next year ...

I will miss you.

You have been my hiding place
My favorite walk
A space to talk,
With friends. Who have already left

Four years finished
And before I feel that I started
My time with you is up.

It's time to find a new

Bamboo
Forest.

I Am What I Am

Jasmine Heath

I am what I am
But
I am not what you say I am.
You say
I am a beast
But
I say I am a threat.
You say
I am aggressive
But
I say I am fierce.
You say
I am bossy
But
I say
I am the Queen of my jungle.
You say
I am overbearing
But
I say I am a protector.
I say
You cannot tell me who I am
But
Only I can say who I am.

Colorful Leaves

Jasmine Heath

Colorful leaves
It is very beautiful
But it's death

Oasis

Sophie Iannuzzi

At the edge of a bright green lawn in the middle of the desert, a young woman's chapped lips stretch to a hopeful grin as what little strength she has left is enough to get her over the fence.

No sooner do her toes reach the softness of the grass does the glow of a laser disintegrate her legs entirely, the flesh curling up to her hip as it burns like bacon in a pan.

"They're all lookin' fer water," the homeowner mumbles to the titanium mutt at his side from his place on the porch. "Power 'n water ... maybe a li'l bit'a hospitality."

Tarry fluid dribbles onto his chin as he spits his chew beyond the railing of the porch, which goes ignored as the curved rockers of his chair sway against the wooden planks as slow and easy as the desert breeze.

"They ain't gonna find it here."

Pageant

Sophie Iannuzzi

“She’s beauty, she’s grace, she’s Miss United States...”

The song went on as two rows of young women, twelve in total, smiled wide and fought the urge not to cry on live television as glittering high heels carried the victor of the pageant towards the mark at center stage. Radiant in a way that captured the combined hearts of the panel’s four judges, she beamed, perfect rows of pearly white teeth reflecting the stage lights in every which way, hamming it up for the cameras coming in for a close-up. She even went so far as to let a single tear fall from her brilliant blue eyes, if only to be swept away by a perfectly manicured finger. The image, broadcasted to millions across the nation—and in some cases, the world—was a producer’s dream.

The dream quickly ended with a bullet driving through the beauty queen’s skull. Miss South Dakota recoiled from her hit as her fellow contestants screamed. A syrupy blue liquid began to drip from the hole between her eyes and her jaw detached, opening wider and wider to fit the rows of teeth violently sprouting from her gums. The screech elicited from her bubblegum pink lips was unearthly as she took out the emcee with a swipe of her claws and proceeded to stomp about the stage, looking for a clear path in which to make an escape.

Multiple men in SWAT uniforms stormed the aisles of the crowd, taking position with their shields and weapons all aimed at the beauty queen.

“Everybody stand back!” they shouted at the crowd.
“Evacuate the theater!”

Miss South Dakota shrieked like a harpy at the men in uniform. Her maw continued to stretch and widen itself, causing her face to tear in multiple sections until the flesh all but left her skull, making way for the new arrangement of bones and leathery skin coming through, making her true form apparent to those still watching the horrific scene.

The SWAT team began to shoot at the beast, but that soon proved useless when the bullets ricocheted off its body, hitting the other female contestants cowering behind it.

Miss South Dakota launched herself from the stage and grpped onto the ceiling with the insect-like sticky pads of her feet, and crawled to the air vent, which in mere seconds she was able to unlatch it with her mouth and crawl inside, making a swift exit from the theater.

Bullets continued to hit the ceiling surrounding the vent’s opening, but it was all for nought, as the beast was long gone.

Those in the audience were asked to give their thoughts on the story when the press came round on the day following the event, but when it came to explaining the situation, none could think of an

adequate way to explain what they had seen, what they'd heard, what they'd smelled.

SHAPE-SHIFTING ALIEN BELIEVED TO USE ITS ABILITIES TO UNFAIR ADVANTAGE. 5 DEAD, 7 INJURED AT MISS UNITED STATES PAGEANT.

Dead End

Sophie Iannuzzi

“Is there someone close to you who you’re missing? Find yourself saying ‘if only I could speak to them one more time?’ Call now to get connected! No credit card required for the first half hour!”

Telecommunal Regeneration. It was on the cover of *Huffington*, *New York Times*, *Washington Tribune*, not to mention a main focus on multiple news channels. To him it always seemed so irrational, but now, in the sickly green glow of a television kept on too late in the evening, it doesn’t seem like such a bad idea. A target audience is met in those who feel the type of tired and loneliness that comes from viewing late-night infomercials, and he is a part of the demographic.

He picked up the phone, dialed, and was met with the oddly comforting sound of smooth jazz.

“Second Chance Telecommunications, helping *you* reconnect, one memory at a time! To connect with a Relative, press one. For Friends, press two. For Significant Other, press three. For Others, press four. For billing, or to speak with an opera—”

The automated voice was cut short as his thumb hit the number three.

“You have chosen, Significant Other. For Spouses, press one. For Girlfriends, Boyfriends, or Partners, press two. Fo—”

Two.

“Please state the name, birth date, and hometown of the person you are wishing to connect with.”

There was a long beep, soon followed by a pregnant silence which was his to fill. “Um ... Keaton Wyman. June seventh, nineteen eighty-four ... Mesa, Arizona.”

Another beep, and the smooth jazz returned, this time with the cheery automated voice from before.

“Please hold while we find whom you are looking for. Once found you will be redirected to your call. If for any reason you should wish to end the call, please ask for an operator.”

As he waited he imagined the answering service being run from heaven; or God forbid, Hell. He thought of some angel holding a clipboard with the little information given, calling out to a room full of deceased, waiting for one of them to turn his or her head at the familiar name to be ushered to the phone. Though it is far from funny, the thought brought an amused smile to his face, but it was short lived when the jazz cut off with an internal click and was switched out with the ringing tone of a connected call.

He hadn't quite thought the Second Chance call through, as proven by the rapid pace in which his

heart took off; more from nerves than anything else. He wasn't sure what to expect.

"Heya."

The voice on the other end cut through like a knife to the gut, and his mouth was left too dry to respond.

The faux Keaton seemed to be listening to his breaths before speaking once more. "Hello? Babe? You there?"

"W-Who is this?" he asked.

"Um... *Key*. Who the hell else would it be?" It laughed.

"No, I mean, like, this is nice and everything, but ... you sound just like him. It's uncanny actually."

"What are you talking about? John, it's *me*."

"I can't do this. Who are you? I know you're not him."

"If you would like proof, I can give it to you." The other voice stopped, and was replaced with a subtle ticking that sounded as if something was being computed. "Saturday the twelfth of March, twenty-sixteen ... We went to the farmer's market. We had a great time. Heirloom tomatoes were bought ... along with melons, and ... the car broke down on the way home but that didn't put a damper on the day."

"That doesn't mean anything. I want to speak with an operator," he spoke sternly into the phone's receiver.

“Or Friday, August thirty-first, twenty-twelve... *Lawless* was playing at the theater, and we tried that new pizza place.” It continued, almost restlessly.

“Operator. Operator. *Operator!*” he raised his voice over the sound of the other’s, hoping to break through to someone on the off chance that they were listening in.

“May fifteenth, twenty—” There was a heavy click and the voice disappeared, followed by another. Far more human and less upsetting, though he was still quite disturbed.

“Hello, how can I help you?” said a woman—the smile could be heard in her voice.

“What the hell is this? I don’t like this at all!”

“Okay, I understand you are dissatisfied with your service and you would like a re—”

“No! No. I don’t want a—I didn’t pay for anything. I just want to know what this is!” The sound of desperation was thick in his voice as he sat alone in the dark living room. “Who was I talking to?”

“Sir, we here at Second Chance Telecommunication are dedicated to making each and every phone call a pleasant experience for our customers. Please tell me how I can best assist you.” The sound of her reading from an obvious script only managed to make him feel worse about the situation, rather than alleviate him of his frustrations.

"I know I wasn't speaking to him. I *know* that. I just want to know how you managed to do this."

"I assume you are talking about the personality calibration?" the woman asked, adding a slight sigh to the end of the sentence as if she had heard the question a thousand times already in just one day.

"I don't know what that is."

With phone in hand, held tightly to his ear, he looked around his home. An eerie chill held tightly to his upper arms and breathed cool against his spine: he couldn't escape the feeling of being watched despite the fact that he knew he was alone. He always was.

"I will explain, sir. We take the information provided to the public from various social networking platforms to mold the persona of who they used to be—that's where the memories come from—then we screen past phone calls to sample the sound of their voices, obtain their vernacular, and to recognize common speech patterns. The more you speak with it, the more it learns and grows in intelligence. Very quickly will it adapt to its personality, and it will be as if the person themselves had never left at all. We are still in the beta stage of testing, mind you, but we have received minimal complaints thus far, considering how many new accounts we create each day," her voice dropped from its cheery chirp to something more solemn and sincere. "It's not ideal, I *know*, but it's the next best thing."

"But it's not the *real* thing."

“No. It isn’t.”

In spite of this, he found the company name attached to his credit card bill at the end of the month. Then the next ... then the next ...

You Don't Want Me the Way I Want You

Shaqueena Kemp

You don't want me the way I want you
When I see you, chills run down my spine
My heart will be cold until you do

Can't keep my mind and keep you too
I just want to take you out, wine and dine
My heart will be cold until you do

I'm in love with you and you have no clue
I love your features, they're so fine
You don't want me the way I want you

When I'm not with you my day is blue
I can't wait until you're mine
My heart will be cold until you do

Watching you walk away is a good view
You're like a goddess, you deserve a shrine
You don't want me the way I want you
My heart will be cold until you do

The Thought of You with Someone Else

Shaqueena Kemp

The thought of you with someone else
I don't like that

Next Big Thing

Matt Malik

Breathe in, breathe out, my hands feel loose, more loose than they have ever been. My opponent doesn't have anything for me—he's slow, he's old, he's basic, and his name is Carl. Carl, it just sounds nerdy and the dude fights UFC? Dude can't fight UFC, especially against me, not me, because I'm Norman, Norman "Scandalous" Newman.

"Yo, Norman, you ready?"

"Pops, I was born ready. And I told you it's Scandalous! My name needs to be reinforced or the UFC won't notice me." My knees bob up and down; I can feel the excitement growing over me.

"Son, you have much bigger things to worry about than the UFC—your nickname for one. But you have the biggest fight of your life ahead of you. Carl the Clobberer isn't a joke. Get your ass up and let's go."

I stand up, my legs feel great, my body is ready. I hop back and forth a bit to get the blood flowing to my legs. I throw one kick, then lead into a right hook and a left uppercut—my most deadly combination. I begin to walk down death row, for I am the executioner, and Carl is the condemned. Tonight I will make my mark on the division and make sure everyone will know my name. I step out of the locker room into another small musty room, a hint of mold tingles my nostrils. The smell reminds me of my basement, and the long

excruciating nights I spent there. Minute after minute, hour after hour, I spent in that sweltering hot hell hole perfecting my kicks, perfecting my smooth spinning head kick—I can hear Joe Rogan now, “WOWWWW, THAT KICK IS BRUUUUUTAL—Scandalous sets that up beautifully with his overhand right.” That’s right, Joe Rogan, I watched your tutorial with Georges St. Pierre. I finally come to the last door, a black flimsy looking thing marked up with dents and scratches from previous fighters who had a sort of personal vendetta against the door; however, like a pro, I casually push my way through the door and into the tunnel.

The tunnel seems endless; nervously I step forward, each step more excruciating than the last; the cold floor is littered with dirt and spilt beer—lovely. Wait, why am I nervous? What would Christof say? “I don’t think no-ting, my opponent is no-ting, I honest. I step in oct-a-gon, and feel no-ting. Emotionless. This guy, he slow. I will clobber him with first exchange and watch his head bounce like ball on canvas.” Christof is right, I need to breathe and become emotionless, become the fighter I know I am. Just last night I beat my little brother in a wrestling match and gave him a black eye—after he tripped and hit the corner of the coffee table, but it counts. My brother has always been there for me, especially during training. Sure, mom didn’t always approve, but who cares? I am about to mark my spot on the map as the best of all time and Tanner helped a lot. “He’s 9 years old and still in school,” she would say, but he was a dirty one, always biting and pinching, really got me ready for some gnarly stuff.

I am met with Harken, the cut-man, a big burly sort of man. He has a lip piecing that is almost covered by his lumberjack style beard, and in his shaved black hair there is one pink streak that stands out. Harken smiles and begins rubbing my face, arms, chest, and ass with petroleum jelly—always with the pat and rub down, but this one is a little *too* thorough. Harken felt my ass a little too long and I’m pretty sure he gave it a little squeeze. Harken is a good guy, a bit of a switch hitter, but he’s a good man ... Carl, dammit, I need to think about Carl. There he is standing in the ring, smug-looking bastard. All of 5 foot 4 and 145 pounds, he was a stocky little midget, lats like wings, and a body that looks as though it was chiseled from stone—this dude is a specimen, besides the height that is. Doesn’t matter, he isn’t a threat to me and my 5 foot 9 frame and lightning-quick reflexes. My spin kick will hit him faster than a Mack truck travelling 90 mph colliding with a family of raccoons. He’ll be out and I’ll be victorious. Harken gives me a fist bump, slaps my chest, and winks at me—this guy. As I begin my ascent into the ring I feel a light tap on the ass—are you kidding me—I grab the rope and duck under, lifting one leg in, then the next. “You go get him, Scandalous!” I hear.

The canvas is rough under my toes, but is very easy to grip. I walk into my corner and stare across the ring to my opponent. He had a banner—I should have a banner—it reads, “The Time is Now,” how silly. At least I don’t have a banner that says that. I smile, “That banner is ridiculous,” I say.

“What?”

I turn to my corner, my Dad is there, I grin; my mouthpiece displays an image of blood covered teeth, I'm a savage, I say, or I think I did.

My legs feel great, almost like Jello, so loose, so wobbly; Carl won't know what hit him. Damn, it's really hot in here. I start to perspire on my forehead, then my arms, then shortly after I feel wet all over. Who the hell turned the heat up?

The announcer was reading the introductions now—is that Harken? "Fighting out of the—" He's not the usual announcer, but I guess Dan couldn't do it tonight. That's fine, announcers aren't the reason I'm here—is he saying my name? "Presenting 'Scandalous' NEWMAN NORRRRRMANNNNNNN!" Of course, he would say it wrong; I take a step forward and raise my hand triumphantly, bang my chest a few times to the roar of the crowd—74 people strong—and meet Carl in the middle of the ring.

"Your time is u-u-up, Cl-cl-cl-clobberer, you hear that bell? That's me coming to co-co-collect your head."

"Touch your tips and fight like good lads," says Harken. What the hell is going on?

I reach my hand up and promptly give Carl the coward the middle finger. "Go to hell, Carl, nerd."

I laugh and stumble back to the corner.

"Where is the soda? Why did the mailman prepare you a nice cuisine, Norman?" my dad says to me, and squirts water in my mouth; he knows me too well. I'm

about to cook this dude one hell of a cuisine, one so nice that even Chef Ramsay will be jealous.

“Ready to dance?” Harken points at me.

I laugh. “With you? Every day, babycakes.” I wink and Harken claps his hands.

I begin to lightly hop forward when I feel a crushing blow to the head, I begin to fall, my head snaps sharply against the canvas. My eyes stop working.

I awake. My head is killing me, I reach up and touch it—an aching throb reverberates from the initial contact. “Ughhhh.” I hear movements, but my eyes are too heavy to cooperate, and I feel as though I’m slipping out of consciousness when I smell a distinct odor: lavender and rubbing alcohol—my favorite. I unwillingly open my eyes to find I am no longer in the ring, but in a hospital bed surrounded by family. “Where am I? Did I get knocked out?”

“Well, son, I got some good news and some bad news.”

“What is it?” I feel the tears welling up in my eyes. I lost. I got knocked out faster than anyone in the history of UFC. The tears are just a sign of how in over my head I was; I’m a pansy. Dreading the answer I repeat myself, “What happened, dammit. What the hell happened?”

“Well, here’s the thing: you got into the ring fine, but something wasn’t right. You started speaking gibberish and all this other nonsense about dancing with Harken and his firm ass. Honestly, son, I’m not

surprised in your choice of men, but Jesus, that was a bad time to come out.”

I shake my head, “No, no, no, you were saying those things, Dad, WHAT HAPPENED?”

“Again, you were saying some weird stuff until you went to touch gloves; the showmanship was back and you gave Carl the finger. We thought you were just nervous, and overcame it—we were wrong. Long story short the bell rang, you took a few steps forward, and you fell over. Unconscious, UN-CON-SCIOUS. No strikes, nothing, you just passed out son ... and let me tell you, I have never heard a sound like the sound that erupted from your head colliding with that canvas. That sound is enough to make someone’s heart stop; for a moment I thought mine did.”

The tears are now rushing down my face and I can no longer hide it. I feel as though my world is ending. “What the hell is the good news?” I hear myself saying.

My dad smiles, reaches into his back pocket, and pulls out his wallet almost bursting from the cash. “The betting line was too good to pass up.”

The Rapture

Matt Malik

Christians of America,

My name is God, well, that's my title anyway. I am here to tell you that in two weeks' time I will arrive to claim you. Don't pack, don't prepare, just wait and say your good-byes. I will be there for you.

*You're's truly,
God*

"You would think God could use that right 'your,' right?"

"Eh, everyone makes mistakes."

Sure enough, in two weeks those who received the letters vanished—thank God I wasn't with them. Turns out the United States government had this in the works for the last millennia. All the "devout Christians" were brainwashed. Those who were considered atheists were actually the few who weren't affected by the neurotic necrosis that occurred when the human ingested fluoride. It essentially made them zombies to the Christian faith—now, in their minds they serve their country for God—killing other zombies.

Miranda

Haley Morrissey

Miranda lay on the bed staring aimlessly at the ceiling while the nurses hooked her up to the IV. She barely even felt the needles anymore, and at this point she was pretty sure she could get herself prepped. This was her 42nd surgery after all.

It was a bit twisted that Miranda had to have so many surgeries considering the fact that she had near perfect health thanks to a few tweaks to her genetic programming, but she knew that it wasn't about her.

As the anesthetic slid into her body she started to drift off, but not before she recognized the figure who had wheeled her into the room and kissed her on the forehead. The face smiled at her. It was her face—a weaker, sicker, slightly older version of her face. And as always, Miranda smiled back; this was the face that her perfect body would save.

The Capacity for Survival

Katie Mosca

She woke with a start. Her heartbeat pounded in her ears, and her breath escaped in shallow exhales. Looking around, she noticed nothing had changed in her surroundings except for the sun peeking over the ridge.

Once her heart was quiet and her breathing normal, she slowly got up from under the weathered wall she used as protection for the night. Next, she shook off the dust that covered her worn clothing, really scraps that she sewed back together as some form of jacket. She wore old jeans that fit her well and were still in good condition; she made sure to keep her clothes clean even though she had been walking in the dusty landscape for the past few weeks. Her shirt was a well-worn flannel that her father gave her on her last birthday, a memory she held onto tightly so it wouldn't fade away.

She hadn't seen her parents for two months and she buried her sister one week ago. Somehow she has managed to keep walking, probably because she didn't know what else to do. Her father was very clear: she and her sister had to make it to the border and their aunt's home before the first snowfall. She knew she had to keep her promise to be there.

How would she tell her parents about her sister's death? They came out of nowhere, the knife drawn, asking for her sister's pack. She had managed to hide

her own pack, but her sister's was still out that night as they prepared dinner around the fire.

There were two women and a teenage boy, and they were scared but they needed food. Her sister wouldn't give them her pack, said her parents gave it to her, and she wouldn't let it go. The women pleaded, their eyes wild with fear and hunger. The boy was quiet, his eyes on the ground. It was him who stabbed her once in the stomach.

As she watched her sister fall to the ground, crouched over, blood trickling out of her mouth, the three thieves left with their prize.

She held her sister as she died. She thought about killing herself with the small hunting knife she took before they left. She wept in silence in the ravaged hole of earth they were using as a place to bed.

The next morning she couldn't move. But her promise to her father made her get up, made her feet work as she wearily crossed the dusty ground. With no trees around, she was forced to take the brunt blow of the wind constantly. All the trees were burned from the bombing, the earth cut up into dry brittle segments of land.

This morning the wind was quiet. The sun felt close by, but after the Day the Sky Fell with Fire, there was a cold blanket that fell over the earth, and the jacket she stitched together barely seemed to keep the frosty arms of human destruction from wrapping her in a frozen embrace.

Taking a sip of water from the canteen in her pack, she heard a shuffle behind her. Heart rate spiked, she drew her knife and spun around, ready for human desperation. Instead, she found a small dog with pointed ears and spots. The dog's eyes were tired, but kind.

She stood frozen looking down at the dog. The dog sat and looked up at her, hoping for kindness. Her heart started to brighten as she watched the dog watch her.

"Come, here," she said.

The dog came.

When she started to pet the mangled fur, the dog started wagging her tail, and a smile formed on her lips. She had forgotten how it felt to smile.

She decided to see if the dog would follow her, so she gave her a piece of the bread she still had in her pack, mostly stale but still edible, and then started the day's walk.

She didn't turn around but she could hear the dog's steps behind her, the steady, quiet panting keeping rhythm with her own footfalls.

They walked that way for what felt like an hour or so, the dog a few paces behind her. The sun was rising in the sky just barely waking the sleepy cold that stretched across the broken landscape.

The girl's name was Lilly, and she remembered her home. She remembered how it felt when she walked

barefoot in the grass and how cool fresh stream water felt on her skin. She remembered how beautiful the world used to be. She could still feel the soft touch of summer breezes pulsing through the woods where they would go camping.

Lilly lived in what used to be called Washington, DC. Before the War the country was still united in what were called states. Now there were no states, no leadership, no government, no order. The capacity for human evil grows from the destruction of hope and the infestation of fear.

The War was created from fear as well. People feared others who feared them back, and what resulted was terror. Bombs fired from one end of the earth to the other, the sky consumed by fire and the earth torn and blistered.

Those who survived the bombs were on their own. Fear manifested and destroyed order and evil sprung from chaos.

The only way to survive, her father said, was to take refuge in the colder climates. Canada was not nearly as physically destroyed and the government was not completely overthrown. It was clear that the only way to survive was to make it to Canada.

Lilly's father was a War consultant, trying to protect the world from death, but not even his efforts and the efforts of men and women fighting against War movements across the world were enough to stop human fear. It came three months ago, human fear in the forms of bombs and fire.

He sent Lilly and her sister Jude ahead of him and their mother. He told them that he needed to work a little longer in the old capital before he left, and their mother would stay with him to help. There was much aid needed, as crime was reckless in DC. The government was destroyed; people killed and other atrocities committed—often openly on the streets.

Lilly was scared, but she trusted her father, and she and her sister weren't sent on their own—that would have been insane. They were sent with a team of military officials from DC who was leading a group of civilians to the Canadian border.

It was luck that their aunt lived in Canada, who had a small farm she homesteaded right over the border. The military team from the capital was supposed to help escort them to the border and the custody of their aunt.

That was the plan.

Raiders attacked one night and Lilly and her sister were separated from the group. They couldn't go back, so they went forward. Three weeks later her sister was dead, and now she had a dog at her heels.

Lilly decided to name the dog Kit. She looked like some type of herding dog with a short build, square snout, and sharp ears. Still after three hours into the day Kit remained with her.

With the sun almost in the middle of the sky, her hair shown a bright brown, highlighted by the unblocked

strength of the sun's rays. She tried to keep her hair out of the way in a tight braid slightly drawn to the left—her dominant side. She was about average height, 5 foot 7 inches, with a defined chin and round cheeks. Her most stunning feature was easily her dark green eyes. Her father called her his “emerald beauty.” She would always blush at the name, her eyes sparkling when her emotions blazed. Her shoulders were slight and she was petite in build, but her mind was sharp—the reason she had survived this long.

Now that the sun was high enough in the sky to actually break the barrier of frozen air, she decided to stop at what looked like an old rest stop; the sign read “ELL,” and the remnants of the building were licked with scars from flames.

She found a spot to rest and sat on the curb as she opened her pack. She hadn't seen anyone since she started walking, and she was beginning to worry her luck was about to run out. She had had three encounters with drifters since her sister died, and each time she was able to scurry away without much trouble. By now, she had learned how to keep her head down and out of the way so she wasn't an easy target.

Most crime was theft, but there was an increase in cases of murder and rape since the bombs came. Not that these cases were reported, but Lilly knew. Her sister's death was the closest she had encountered to terror, but she understood how vulnerable she was during her journey.

Being only eighteen years old and traveling alone, she knew the chance of making it to her aunt's was slim,

but she was going to do everything in her power to protect herself. Looking at Kit made her feel safer.

“Come, Kit.” The dog was shy but she obeyed, getting closer to Lilly than she had before.

They shared a lunch of bread and dried venison, and when Kit needed a drink, Lilly pooled some water in the cap of her canteen and let her lick to her delight.

“Not too much, Kit. We have to save what we have till we make it to the next spring.” The dog cocked her head and sniffed the air, as if she was trying to understand.

“I’ll explain.” Lilly continued. She hadn’t spoken in a long while, so conversation with the dog was refreshing.

“The officials in DC created a plan to get people to Canada. They set up a system where springs were dug along the path from the middle of the East Coast all the way to the entry point at the border. Scouts went out ahead with contractors who dug the springs to provide water to those traveling. Now all I have to do is follow the map and I can find the springs to refill my canteen. They used to be secure, but now that raiders have found some of the locations, they are extremely dangerous. But don’t worry. I have a plan to access the next one.”

She rubbed Kit’s ears and the dog squinted with happiness, slowly sitting at her feet. Lilly’s heart started to soften as she stroked her new companion’s head.

“We have to be careful though.” She paused. “But I’m sure I don’t have to tell you just how cruel humans can be.” Lilly scanned the dog’s body and saw scars cut into her side. Some looked like they could have been caused by knives, and one of her ears was shorter than the other, a piece of flesh cut off either from another animal or worse a human blade.

“Who hurt you?” she asked the dog.

Kit looked up at her face and twitched her nose. While the dog was docile and kind in temperament, Lilly could sense pain behind the blue/grey color of her shepherd eyes. She could sense the pain because she was sure the dog could see her own caught in her green eyes as she looked back at her with a quiet stare.

“You want to know the truth? I’m tired, Kit. I’m so damn tired!” The spike in her voice caused the dog to perk her ears and she stepped back cautiously, but then sat back down by Lilly’s feet.

“I’m sorry, pup. I’m not mad at you. I’m mad at everything else. I’ve been walking so long that I can’t stop. But I want to, Kit. I want to stop.”

Lilly shook her head and looked away, her chin resting on her shoulder. Tears found their way to the corners of her eyes, and her face crumbled as they tricked down her cheeks silently.

She opened her eyes and the green of her irises caught the light just right to show a hue of brown drawn from her dark eyebrows and eyelashes. There was a pattern

of travel the tears took that seemed to make their way through the maze of freckles on her face.

She shook her head again and wiped the despair from her eyes.

“There is no time for that is there, Kit? We have to keep going. Not too much farther till the next spring.”

The dog was still quietly sitting, watching everything that transpired in the last few minutes.

Lilly slowly rose from the curb and slung her pack onto her back. Her knife was neatly tucked into its sheath that she kept strapped to her leg, and she made sure to have her hand nearby in case she had to draw abruptly.

As she rose Kit got to her feet as well, but then waited for instructions. This time when they set off, the dog walked next to Lilly and no longer behind her. They were so close in stride that sometimes Kit would rub her leg and Lilly would feel the safety of her new companion as well as a flicker of hope: maybe she would survive this trek.

As the sun fell in the sky, the two still walked in similar cadence. They were reaching the entrance of a burnt and destroyed housing development when a yell startled them. Kit halted and perked up her ears, trying to find the source of the shout.

Lilly's heartbeat began racing as she searched as well, but before she could determine the direction from which the sound came, Kit started to trot towards one

of the houses; the windows were broken and the roof was partially caved in, but no other damage was visible.

“Kit,” she called in a whisper. “Kit, come.” But the dog kept trotting towards the right side of the house that was out of view. Hunching over and jogging, Lilly heard crying as she followed the dog.

She slowed to a walk when she saw Kit sitting under the window looking up at her, her ears down and fur raised. Lilly slowed her pace even more and tried to control her breathing even though she could hear her heart escaping her chest with every beat—the only sound fighting with the whimpering of someone inside the house.

Creeping to the side, she peered through the window. It was dark inside, but she could make out a small form on the ground, clearly a woman, huddled over trying to protect herself from the large shadows whispering to each other in the back. Her clothes were torn and Lilly could see that she was bleeding.

Lilly kept herself tight to the side of the house so that she wouldn't be seen.

Kit whimpered.

“Shhhhhh. It's ok. You have to be quiet, girl,” Lilly cooed to the dog. Kit's ears lay flat against her head as one of the shadows spoke.

“Stop your crying! It would have been easier on yourself if you just did what I asked.”

The shadow moved closer to the woman and Lilly could make out his features. He was a large bald man with a rough looking face. His cheeks were sharp—almost pointed—and his muscles bulged under his soiled shirt that was torn at the sleeve.

“Leave her alone, Rick. They gave up her food and you got what you wanted. Let’s just go,” the second shadow said.

“I don’t think she wants to live. Do you, darling?” The large man bent down towards the woman and she flinched as he came near, her cries muffled under her arms as she tried to shield her bloodied face from her tormentor.

Bile rose in Lilly’s throat as she watched the scene take place, and she looked away as the hulking man kicked the woman hard. She cried out louder.

“Come on, Rick. Let’s go. Someone might find us. I don’t really feel like struggling to keep what we won. He already gave us one hell of a fight.”

The second shadow came forward and it wasn’t until he walked to the corner of the room that Lilly noticed a man slumped against the wall, his head flopped on his chest, and blood splattered behind him, still dripping to the floor.

Lilly almost retched, but held her position so she wouldn’t give the now visible second man a chance to spot her.

He was smaller than the second with mousy features and an abrasive scar covering the right side of his face. He was chewing on what appeared to be dried meat, and spat a piece on the dead man when he came near.

“Good thing we pinched this gun before we came across these two, huh? Rick, quit fucking around with her. Leave her and let’s go. She isn’t going to make any trouble for us.”

The large man was bent over the woman whispering something distressing in her ear; her whole body shuddered and she tried her best to squirm away from the looming figure.

Lilly felt her legs going numb but she couldn’t move. She saw the man pull his knife from his belt and she understood what was about to happen.

He was quick; he jerked her head forward, slid the knife along her neck, and then let her body drop. Then he stood over her as she convulsed.

“Fuck, Rick!” The second man shook his head and stalked over to the far corner. “I don’t understand why you had to kill her. You had already fucked her up enough.” The smaller man grabbed both packs on the ground and shouldered one as he gave the other to his partner.

“She ripped my shirt,” he responded.

They walked towards the hole on the far side and left and the house.

Lilly stood frozen in place. It took her a few moments and the fading of their footfalls to come back to reality. She noticed that Kit was slinked against her side with her head down.

The dog was almost flush against her leg, so once Lilly was sure the men were gone, she patted the dog and encouraged her up.

“Come on, girl.” The dog stood and looked cautiously at her.

Dazed with shock Lilly started to climb through the window into the house.

Not wanting to be left out, Kit trotted over to the other side of the house to the hole through which the men left.

Carefully stepping around debris covering the floor, Lilly tiptoed though the room to the woman’s body on the floor, making sure not to get close to the dead man slouched against the wall to her right.

By now Kit was at the hole in the wall, but waited outside, clearly worried to enter. She sat down and let out a quiet whimper.

Lilly looked at the dog but then quickly back at the dead woman on the floor. Very carefully she made her way to the body and hovered above looking down on the beaten corpse, the dark blood still pooling around the body.

It wasn't her first time seeing a dead body, and thus she found herself unnervingly calm.

She could feel her heartbeat clearly through her pulse but the pumping of her heart was controlled.

The body was badly bruised and cut. Her shirt was torn open and her flesh was still red where the men had hurt her.

Lilly closed her eyes and swallowed. A faint tear found itself caught in the corner of her right eye.

Fuck them, was all she could think, and she could feel hatred rise in her face. She crouched down close enough to the body without stepping in the blood and reached out towards the woman's eyes, which were still open. She kindly and gently closed the lids.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered. "I'm so sorry you suffered. No human should suffer. *You* should not have suffered this. I'm so sorry humans are full of hate." She spoke quietly, hoping her words would reach this woman's soul somehow. Then she rose to her feet and just as carefully as before crept across the floor to the opening in the wall and Kit waiting patiently.

"Hey, pup. I'm sorry you saw this too."

Lilly touched the dog's head as she walked, and Kit followed her with her eyes but didn't move.

Suddenly Lilly felt light headed and her legs wobbled. She fell to the right and caught herself against the side

of the house as she crumbled into a heap. Tears streamed from her face, her eyes were shut tight, and her body quivered from the force of her shudders. Everything felt as if it was crushing her. *What was the point?* she thought. *I've been walking for so long and to what? How do I even know my aunt is alive? Or my parents? How much hate and suffering must I witness?* She could see her sister dying in her arms, her face paralyzed by pain, blood still on her lips. She could see the woman still alive, her body racked with agony. She could see the man against the wall, his brain splayed behind him. She could see the anger and hate in the huge man's eyes as he watched his victim die. It was all too much. Lilly closed her eyes tighter and hugged her body, hoping for death herself. *Please, she begged, let me die.*

But her internal struggle was interrupted by a wet touch on her arms. She opened her eyes and through her tears she could see Kit staring at her. The dog's blue eyes looked wet as well. Lilly opened her arms and threw herself around the dog, wiping her tears on her fur.

"Thank you. Thank you, God, for giving me this dog."

With her heart somewhat patched, Lilly wiped her eyes and got up.

"We can't stay here tonight, can we?"

For the first time Kit wagged her tail.

"Alright, I take that as you agreeing. Let's find a place to rest."

The two started walking away from the house, leaving the pair alone in their burnt grave.

The sun was setting by the time they finally got on their way, and Lilly knew it wasn't safe to be out in the dark, so they continued only a little way before she spotted a good place to spend the night.

It was a shed in the backyard of a house still mainly intact. She figured it was hidden well enough to not be noticeable from the road. If any drifters came through they would pick the house before they went to the shed.

"How's this, pup?" she asked the dog.

Kit wagged her tail again in response.

"If it's good enough for you, it's good enough for me."

Lilly walked over to the shed and opened the hatch. Inside was a small area that clearly used to hold tools. It had been picked over by raiders and drifters, but the walls and floor were stained where supplies once lay.

She walked in and set her pack on the floor so she could get out what she needed for the night: a flashlight, a piece of bread, and a chunk of the venison from her food rations.

Before she and Jude left for the boarder, food rations from the government were given to the group they traveled with as the only disaster relief that was available after the bombing.

Lilly was careful to make her ration last, often forcing herself to go to bed hungry so Jude could eat. Looking at the bag with her rations, she realized she was running low, but luckily, based on the map she had, there was only one more spring before the border, meaning her trip was almost over. She prayed that her aunt was alive, that the border was still protected, and that she would be safe once she entered Canada.

“Looks like this is all we have for dinner, pup.” Lilly broke off a piece of the venison and gave it to Kit who was lying down on the shed floor watching the human unpack the bag.

Kit licked her lips with appreciation but did not beg for more; she simply looked at Lilly with her intent blue eyes.

Lilly took enough of her rations for the night, placed the rest of her food in her pack, brought it to the back of the shed and hid it in the far corner, and then turned on the flashlight and closed the hatch door.

“We are in for the night,” Lilly told the dog.

Kit kept watching her, but didn’t move. Lilly sat down against the inside of the shed and started eating what she had taken from her rations, giving a piece to Kit every so often. It was nice to finally have another living being for companionship, so Lilly slowly ate, cherishing the calm and quiet interaction with the dog. She looked quizzically at her partner and spoke, “Where did you come from, Kit? Is someone looking

for you?" Lilly's eyes grazed over the dog's scars and knew the answer.

"Why do you trust me? When you clearly know how evil humans can be—are ... especially now ..." Lilly shook her head and fed Kit another piece of venison—they had already finished the bread.

"It wasn't always like this, hatred wasn't always so common. I remember kindness." Lilly paused. "The people who killed Jude—my sister—they weren't evil. This world made them thieves. But those men..." the memory of the recent event, still fresh, flashed through her mind and she shut her eyes again. "Those men were always evil."

While Lilly spoke Kit watched, but now that she sensed the girl to be distressed, she crept forward and lay against Lilly, her head resting over her outstretched legs. Lilly stroked the dog's ears and Kit started to close her eyes.

"My mother taught me a song when I was little, before my sister could talk. She told me when I was fearful or felt like the dark was creeping in close that if I sang this song, light would appear. I still remember her singing it to me. Do you want to hear it, Kit?"

The dog nuzzled her leg but kept her eyes closed. Lilly began: "*Peace is true, Peace is bright, whenever you fear, Peace is the light...*"

She switched off the flashlight and closed her eyes as she hummed the rest, sleep close to capturing her mind.

Her right hand touched her knife still strapped to her leg, close enough to grab if she needed it, while her left hand rested on the dog's head. The song bled from conscious thought back into her memory as she slipped into a warm sleep.

The morning came sooner than desired, a stream of light under the hatch of the shed. Lilly rubbed her eyes and saw that Kit was awake as well, her head still resting on the girl's lap. Lilly was still reclined against the wall of the shed and her back was stiff. She massaged her neck with her right hand, tilting her head back and forth to try to stretch out the kinks. As she moved to get up Kit sat up and watched as Lilly prepared breakfast.

"Not a whole lot, Kit, but enough to help us get through morning." Lilly was feeling better today than she had in a while, and she found herself whistling as she opened her pack to get out breakfast for herself and her dog.

After a quick bite, Lilly closed up her pack and cautiously opened the hatch. She heard voices outside, so she made sure to keep herself hidden in the shed as she scanned the housing development from her vantage point.

On the other side of the road by another house that wasn't completely destroyed, Lilly saw a group of people milling about and talking to one another. They looked pretty well kept, and there was mix of people from men to women and even some young children. Lilly figured the group was traveling together to the

border. She looked behind at Kit, and the dog patiently stared back at her.

“They look harmless, and probably are, but it’s easier to travel alone. We will have to move on before they see us.” Kit sneezed and Lilly took the gesture as her agreeing to her plan.

The pair quietly opened the hatch wide enough to walk through and moved to the left towards the back of the house. They crept close to the fence in the backyard and jumped it once they were fully behind the house and out of sight from the group.

Then they started their day’s walk: Lilly listening for footsteps behind her. There was a slim chance that the group would catch up to her and Kit since they had young legs walking with them, but Lilly wanted to be alert in case they closed the gap.

It wouldn’t be the first time she had to peel off the road to keep herself from being noticed by other humans: remaining invisible was the key to staying safe. She learned the importance of invisibility from being separated from the group, from her sister’s death, and now from the event that occurred last night. She still shuddered when she thought about the couple and their fate in the house, and was extra vigilant in looking for the lurking pair who caused such death.

The morning was colder than the day before, and Lilly hoped it was because she was nearing the border. Snow would be coming soon, and her father made sure to tell her that she had to beat the snow in order to not lose her way to the border crossing. Lilly had

checked her map before she and Kit set out for the day, and she figured that she would be at the last spring sometime in the afternoon. She prayed she was right.

Three hours later Lilly could see the outline of the spring, well really only the front of a building that appeared to be empty but really covered the dug well. As she and Kit approached, Lilly saw a group of men gathered around the front. *Raiders for sure*, Lilly thought.

“Alright, Kit. Time to get busy.” Lilly scratched the dog’s head as she stood by her side with her head cocked up at her human leader.

Careful not to be seen, Lilly took off her pack and removed a few of the firecrackers she still had. Before the journey, Lilly took some firecrackers that were left over from when her family last celebrated the Fourth of July. She thought that they might come in handy on her treacherous trip, and she was right: when her sister and she had encountered raiders at a previous spring, a few sudden firecrackers pulled them away from the building long enough for Lilly to fill the canteens.

Now, throwing her pack on her shoulders, she crept up behind a broken down car about a hundred feet away from the building—with Kit behind her. Carefully, she placed the firecrackers behind the tires and lit them. She hurried away from the front of building but closer to the structure, ready for the raiders to jump up with their guns and head over to the car.

BANG! As soon as the firecrackers erupted the raiders left their post, shouts easily heard.

But at the same time, Kit was startled and rushed away from the sound, her tail tucked between her legs and her ears back.

“Kit!” Lilly yelled, the firecrackers still going off, but it was no help. The dog was running blind from the sound and Lilly lost sight of her into the dusty air.

Upset that her companion was gone, Lilly wanted to rush after her, but there wasn’t time. She ran towards the spring and entered the empty building. She was quick, opening the hatch to the spring and getting her canteen out in one movement. She pumped the water up and into her bottle, her heartbeat in her ears. Relief swept over her as she filled the canteen and threw it in her pack. Then she was out the door.

As she moved towards the right around the outside building, she scanned the disfigured ground for Kit, not noticing a dark figure behind her. In a rough lunge Lilly was grabbed from behind and her pack snatched up as she was dragged by the collar of her shirt towards the back of the building away from the entrance.

She cried out in panic but couldn’t see her attacker from the angle by which he had her shirt; her legs scraped the ground as her feet tried to regain her strength and balance. She reached behind her head to try to grab his arm, but no matter how much she twisted she couldn’t resist his brute force. Finally, he let go, her body falling in a sweaty heap.

“What do we have here, Rick?” Lilly recognized the voice and her body shook all over.

“Little scrapper. Looks like she set off the fireworks,” the large man answered.

“Give me her pack. Let’s see what she has for us.”

Lilly looked up at the pair, fear radiating through her.

“Ah, some good stuff in here,” the smaller man said. “And what is this?” Lilly saw that he noticed her knife on her leg and she moved to draw it but the stronger man grabbed her before she had a chance and threw her weight back against the side of the building.

Her body convulsed from the shock of the assault and she could barely breathe. She limply stayed where she was pinned as the larger man took out her knife and ran it against her cheek.

“You can get first pick out of her pack, but I want her.” Lilly could smell rotten teeth as the grimy man spoke only a few inches from her cheeks. He seemed to be enjoying watching fear and desperation fall across her face. Regaining her senses she squirmed against his hold, but her actions only made him more excited.

“Let me grab our gear so we can add from her pack.” Lilly heard the smaller man’s footsteps as he walked back towards the front of the building, her pack on the ground behind the large man.

“Just you and me now. What do you want to do first?” He grinned and Lilly could now see his rotten teeth. She tried to push against his chest but he had her arms pinned by the weight of his body against hers. Hoping death would come quick, Lilly closed her eyes, but remembering the woman in the house, she knew it would take a while before she was killed. Suddenly, the man let out a scream, and Lilly shot open her eyes as she felt his weight fall off her.

She jumped away from him as he crumbled onto the ground, the knife falling from his hand. Grabbing the blade, she regained her footing and drove it into his lower back, between his ribcage, right where her father taught her to strike. He gave off one wet breath as the knife dove into his soft flesh, and she twisted it to make sure she created maximum damage. It wasn't until after she pulled out the knife and looked at his twitching body that she noticed the bite on the back of his leg, blood pouring out of now two open wounds. Lilly wheeled around and saw Kit standing behind her, teeth barred and her ears flat against her head.

“Kit,” Lilly whispered.

The dog stopped growling when she heard the girl speak and looked at Lilly. Their eye contact was quick as they both heard footsteps approaching at a run, their heads snapping towards the sound. Lilly snatched her pack off the ground, threw it over one shoulder, sheathed her knife, and took off at a sprint, Kit running beside her.

She heard gunshots fired, one bullet finding its way to the ground behind her feet, but soon they were out of

range. They ran for about twenty minutes before Lilly turned around to see if they were being followed. No one was around.

She figured that they gave up. One raider's death doesn't call for a funeral. Most raiders care more about looting and killing than seeking revenge for a fellow criminal. Lilly slowed to a brisk walk, and Kit followed. The dog silently moved next to her human and Lilly finally let out a breath. Her body was still shaking but her heartbeat was returning to normal. By now, the sun was setting, and while it was probably a better choice to stop for the night, Lilly was too scared the other raiders might catch up to them to sleep. They kept walking, neither one looking anywhere but ahead of their feet. Lilly turned on her flashlight only when the ground got rocky. Besides that artificial light, she used the stars to guide her. She sunk into her head, thinking about the recent events, and how close she had been to death. Would it have been better to die than to keep walking this horrid trail? Lilly pondered the idea, but when she thought about all the pain and suffering she would encounter before she bled into a fortified sleep, she decided that walking the broken earth was a better fate.

She remembered how she escaped and she let her hand drop, slightly brushing the head of the dog. "Thank you, Kit."

They walked all night, Lilly humming her mother's song in her head. She was dazed, tired, hungry, and thirsty, but her legs kept working so she kept walking. As sun lit up over the cold dry ground, Lilly almost

couldn't believe it when she saw the Canadian flag in the distance.

I'd Like to Tell You Why I'm Special

Kate Niedrick

I'd like to tell you why I'm special
I'd love to tell you all the things that make me
different.
Unique.
Obscure.
One out of a Million.
Your winning lottery ticket.
But I can't.

I don't know why I am the way I am.
Why I prefer a messy room.
Why I'd rather not do crack cocaine
Why I now decided to play guitar
To be honest I'm really not sure what I'm doing
Floating I guess
Waiting you could say

But I'd bet you would really like to know what makes
me special.
What makes me unique.
And I would just tell you "I dunno"
I'm doing what I can
I'm just going through life the best I can
I wish I could give you more
But these are the cards that life deals us
And you have to decide for yourself if you have the
better hand
I think we all have pretty shitty hands
But, hey, they all expect us to win the game
Best of luck

Crack F(r)iends

Ryan Perez

Probably shouldn't have been in this neighborhood, but the hunger was real. I mean Jim couldn't even get smack in the heights, so it was down to the slums whenever the beast yearned for feeding.

Rolling down to 6th, where even the cops were hesitant of going, he thought he might find something to make him feel all right again. Jim knew better than to get out of the car when he was trying to score something, but the craving was too intense this time.

The pills wouldn't do it anymore. Jim needed crack like the need to breathe. If it wasn't crack smoke, it wasn't life.

“WOOOOOORLDSTAAAR!”

Jim's knees buckled and his vision went black.

Waking up, Jim's head was throbbing so severely it seemed there had to be more than just sanity leaving his skull. Curled into a fetal position between a wire fence and a bush, the agony of his flesh was a crippling reminder that he was still unfortunately alive. Lightly probing the pain around his head, Jim could still feel the knockout welt on his left temple and the crusty and coagulated blood on his right eyebrow where he must have hit the concrete. Struggling to sit up, Jim felt his pockets ...

Wallet? Gone.

Phone? Gone.

Keys? Gone.

Location? Fucked.

Damn, even the streetlights and moon seemed dark here. He'd seen it before, but still wondered if the sun ever shined in these parts. Yeah it was a bad part of town, but in all honesty Jim wasn't too out of place.

The craving remained worse than ever. *All I want is some goddamned crack.* Okay, here's the plan: find crack, and then maybe find a way home. Jim knew he might die, but hopefully he'd die high. The beast of addiction within him gave him the strength to combat the already crippling withdrawals. Stumbling to the sidewalk, Jim tried to gather himself. Money wasn't an issue for finding his smack; Jim was wearing Gucci for fuck's sake. Jim should be thankful they didn't look at the tags, else he'd be naked. Brilliant, I'll trade my clothes for a smoke!

Hustling to the nearest street corner Jim looked around and spotted some potential thugs to score from. Approaching them was more dangerous than he realized. Two of the three gripped their concealed gats in anticipation of this well-dressed crackhead.

"Tha fuck you want, junkie?" the taller one said. Aside from height and haircuts, these three guys were pretty indistinguishable dressed in all black.

“You guys got some crack?” Jim asked.

“I got tha dope, you got scrilla?” the thug replied.

“I just got robbed and I’m real bad right now. I’ll give you this jacket for a couple bags ...” The three goons began to laugh. “It’s Gucci,” Jim petitioned.

A sinister look came onto the shortest thug’s eyes as he pulled his gun out saying, “Look, mo’fucka, how ‘bout you just give me that jacket *and* those shoes, then I might not burn yo’ punk-ass.” The gun was aimed right between Jim’s eyes.

Jim started taking off the items he requested. “You can have them, just please lemme get a bag. I’m dyin’, man!” Handing over his clothes, Jim meekly put out his hand with hopes of an offering of sustenance.

“Hell nah, bitch!” said the instigator smacking his hand as he turned away.

“Wait! I’ll do anything! I’ll suck your dick, just help me out!” Jim pleaded.

“You callin’ me gay, mo’fucka?” The thug turned around, still toting the gun with the clothes in his other hand.

“I just need the dope, *please!*”

“You’re not even worth a bullet, bitch.” The thug turned away.

Jim sprung to life and jumped on the back of the thug. Tackling him to the ground, the gun flew out of his hand and Jim scrambled to grab it. Turning around with gun in hand, Jim saw the tall thug rushing him and pulled the trigger.

Once.

Twice.

Three times and they dropped.

The other thug pulled his gun on Jim and they exchanged bullets as the short guy struggled to get up. The short thug was the only one really moving now. It looked like there was no life left in his friends or the foolish crackhead. Frustrated, he went to check his friends for signs of life. Their bodies were completely void of vitality. He turned to the sound of Jim coughing up blood. "You should've just given me the crack, fucker!"

Jim cut the man's life short. Dropping the gun from his grip, he struggled over to the bodies where he suspected the crack was stashed.

Jim died like that—lying face down. Maybe he'll find crack in heaven.

Do You Even Laser Tag, Bro?

Ryan Perez

So, there's this guy at work named Fred. He's a little weird, but hey, who isn't? Most of our co-workers avoid him; sadly, my empathetic side drags me into occasional awkward chats.

It was Friday and Fred approached me as I chowed down on my lunch of rye and pumpernickel BLT, Lay's sour cream and onion chips, and tasty tap water. I tried to concentrate as hard as I could on the juicy sandwich in front of me hoping the walking, talking trap would pass. My intense glare broke only to reveal Fred sitting across the table from me. I knew he was baiting me into conversation, and against my good reason, I obliged.

"Hey, Fred. How's it goin'?"

"I'm doing fantastic, Wil! I had some deeee-lish-us pad-thai at the Golden Wok for lunch."

"Sounds good." This guy didn't even ask how my day was ... ha.

"So, you have any plans for tonight?"

Thinking it was just small talk I replied, "Nah, probably just gonna lounge around my place."

Fred's eyes widened with excitement: "WEWWWW! It looks like you and me are going to play some laser tag tonight!"

Dammit! I ought to know better than to set myself up like that. What kind of grown-ass man invites another grown-ass man to go laser tagging? Being the polite guy I am, already caught in the trap, I offered a meager smile and a hesitant reply, "Suuuure, man."

Fred spilled the details of where and when to meet, and next thing I know it's 7:43 p.m. and I'm in a parking lot outside of "Fun Factory" dressed casually in shorts and a tee shirt.

Holy shit. I can see my goon of a coworker, Fred, across the parking lot dressed head to toe in black. Black military boots, black cargo pants tucked into the boots, black long sleeve under armor tucked into the pants, a black fucking ski mask on his head, and to top it off, this motherfucker had eye-black around his eyes.

Fred enthusiastically yelled over to me, "You're gonna be dead in no time wearing that crap, you softie! I brought some gear for you to tac-up in!"

This is a family establishment, for heaven's sake. I mean soccer-mom-mini-vans and sedans surround us, but I'm feelin' a little froggy, so I go along with it and put on a black shirt that he brought for me to "tac-up" in. Mind you, some of the parents shoot us death stares already ...

Upon walking inside, I started to figure out that everyone here seemed to already know who Fred is. The Fun Factory workers all sported a “holy shit, he didn’t die this week?” look on their faces. Fred ended up paying for both of us, so that was a plus in my book. The participants surrounding us were all easily 15-20 years younger than Fred and me, but it didn’t really seem to faze him at all.

A Fun Factory staff was giving a quick lecture on the rules of laser tag, staring at Fred, as he commanded, “No pushing. No yelling. No biting...” and so on. Looking over, I saw Fred just roll his eyes.

After the short lecture, they began letting us into a room with “laser guns” attached to “laser vests.” Fabulous Fred began to sprint towards the door, pushing through several kids. I got inside the room, and Fred was already strapped up at the kiosk number 17. *“This one’s mine! It’s got superior range and accuracy! Ya’ll don’t stand a chance!”* Believe it or not, this motherfucker started laughing to himself like a maniac. This was bad, and I was beginning to wonder whether Fred may have eaten paint-chips as a child.

The entire group was strapped up with their laser gear and beginning to gather near the entrance to the “LASER ARENA.” Fred approached me as I was checking the vests straps, and I felt him tenderly grab my earlobe and massage it lightly as he looked into my eyes, “Wil, I want you to know that no matter what happens beyond those doors, we’ll always be friends.” He leaned in towards my face and I shuddered as he

whispered, "Never give up, comrade." Shit, shit, shit this is too weird!

A buzzer sounded as the double doors to the arena opened and the kids poured into the room. Fred pulled his ski mask over his face and he ninja-rolled away into the darkness.

I stood still, laser gun in my hand, staring into the room dumbfounded. I'm already here so I figure I'll go in, fire off some lasers, and hope for the best.

Inside, the Laser Arena was pure insanity. The dark room was only illuminated by black lights revealing small screaming forms running as if their lives were in danger from an all-black shadow, which I assumed was Fred.

The absurdity of the Fun Factory ensued and I watched as the "lives" on my laser gun's digital counter began to dwindle. Eventually, I heard a grown man yelling over the screams of children. Realizing Fred was probably terrorizing a poor helpless kid, I decided it was best if I go try to diffuse the situation.

Unfortunately, I walked into Fred as he was roaring at a random kid, "*Are you kidding me? You can't just stand there and shoot me as I recharge!*" The kid continued to pump laser beams into Fred's vest that seemed to fuel the flames of his enraged soul. It was clear Fred had reached his boiling point as he lunged at the kid, grabbed his gun, slammed it to the ground, and proceeded to stomp on it. "*You happy now, kid?*"

Overhead, an employee chimed in from the observation area: “Fred, you better walk away and leave the arena right now!”

Like a deranged madman Fred whipped around and screamed back, “*Why don’t you come down here and make me, Alex?*”

Floodlights flicked on, illuminating the arena and stinging my eyes. Adjusting to the new light, I finally focused on Fred who was now smashing his own laser gun and vest into the ground. I began to exclaim, “Fred! What are you—,” but I was cut short by something knocking me down from behind. A bit rattled, I rolled over to look up at someone, who I’m guessing is some kid’s father, reaching to grab me by my vest.

This guy lifted me up and began to throttle me hollering, “Why are you idiots traumatizing these children? Don’t you two have anythin— *What the hell?*” Following the father’s terrified eyes, I looked over as I was confronted with the sight of Fred aiming a real pistol towards this father (*who I might add is behind me!*).

“*Fred!* Seriously! What the hell is that?!” I yelled frantically. Meanwhile, this parent was still using me as a human shield. I swore I’m never laser tagging again.

Fred had tears in his eyes as he looked back at me: “Never give up, remember, comrade?”

“You’re taking this too far, man. Just put the gun down!”

“We’re friends ‘til the end, right?”

“Fred, knock it off!” I pleaded.

“Don’t worry, Wil, I got a clear shot!”

Needless to say, those were the last words I exchanged with Fred. No, he’s not dead, but he is serving ten years in prison right now for attempted manslaughter (among other charges). Even though the parent used me to block the bullet it ended up barely grazing my arm. Thankfully nobody else was seriously hurt aside from Fred—we heard the police weren’t very gentle. With all the time Fred spent laser tagging it was astounding that he had such poor aim.

A Pier

Ryan Perez

It is always
raining
not that
hard.

cruise down Lincoln
hit 305 around 11 ,
but it looks the same
all the time.

you hoped the
brakes might brake ...
me too

to be Frank
(who I'm not)
i don't like this
town—you don't either

maybe the Son
will come out today—
i passed CMC and chuckled
“wishful thinking”

let the shadow fall
with the rain,
try to embrace
change

change those chains
at least once a day
else you might stick out
more than the pier

a pier to be happy.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Monique Santiago

Broken
in the back room

mirror on the wall
shattered

the mirror
will never

show the
reflection

again except
for red.

Did you Hear That?

Isabelle Sullivan

Did she say she? I think I heard her say she. Well I'm a *she*. And I just walked by her. She's talking about me. I know it. I mean I knew it. I knew she didn't like me. The way she rolled the "s" off her tongue. SHE. I wonder what she was saying about this other she. Maybe I should walk back by. Maybe if I hear another she I should step in. I bet she was talking about my outfit. How dare she talk about my outfit? I was feeling good about how I looked today until I heard her say she. Now I know I'm the she that she's talking about. I can't take it. I wish I had never tried to overhear that conversation.

Scorer

Alex Tharp

I once saw a man score with ease
The opponents he did taunt and tease
Until one day
His skills went away
And now he's a server at Applebee's

Finances

Alex Tharp

A man was in love with a girl
But the sight of him made her hurl
She ran from him
His chances slim
Until she saw his money and gave it a whirl

Freshman Year

Amy Wrozek

Freshman year

Blink

Senior year

The Saddest Routine

Amy Wrozek

We went to bed, the same way we always do—you on the right, me on the left, hand in hand, skin on skin. I sigh, and you pull me in closer to you, asking if I'm okay. I tell you yes, the same way I always do. You know I'm lying, just like I know you don't believe me. But what else am I supposed to say when you love her and I love you?



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Gravity Hill

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Gravity Hill is the student literary journal of St. Andrews University (A Branch of Webber International University). The legend of Gravity Hill claims that many years ago, a mother and her two daughters were in a car that pulled out into the intersection at Stewartsville Cemetery Road and Old Maxton Road, in Laurinburg, NC, and was hit by a tractor trailer, killing all inside. If you drive a car to this intersection and put it into neutral, the car will roll backwards up the hill out of the intersection. The legend is that the mother's and the daughters' spirits remain at the site of the crash, pushing cars backwards, out of the intersection, to safety.



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